

Whitehouse paper cuts Gordian knot

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My primary professional field is not nature conservation, and my comments do not therefore relate to the detailed technicalities of this paper. Rather I am commenting as someone who needs a sustainable, cogent rationale for making practical decisions in this area.

In New South Wales the neglect of a rigorous examination of the rationale for nature conservation has, as the author points out, bedevilled policy makers and field personnel alike. In this paper the author clearly reviews the historic and current arguments, and in my view leads us to a logical conclusion which cuts the Gordian knot and provides a direction which should allow real progress in this area. This paper is an important contribution to the debate and its solution, although there are still some key, unanswered questions.

A key point in the paper rests on the distinction between genetic and ecological diversity. Because of the importance of this point, and because of my unfamiliarity

with the area generally, a clearer explanation of these two approaches, and the implications of their application in the field, is necessary to make the arguments more easily accessible to the lay reader and to many in the public policy area who lack expertise in the subject.

This paper is an ideal jumping off point for the examination of a series of consequent questions and problems. Firstly, there is the question, briefly referred to by the author, of fauna conservation. The author's definition of this problem is spot on — and it appears to me that it needs addressing as a crucial next stage in the development of a nature conservation strategy. Secondly of course are the implications, for a viable nature strategy, of the rapidly diminishing opportunities for new reserve creation. Can a strategy which even approaches the aims outlined in this paper now be devised, or will the combination of historic habitat destruction and present land use and development patterns deal a final blow to any reserve policy?

Response to: Conserving What?—The basis for nature conservation reserves in New South Wales 1967-1989

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The article is most interesting as a review by J. F. Whitehouse as he perceives the forces behind the process that has finally resulted in the existing system of nature conservation reserves in New South Wales. Whitehouse has the disadvantage of not having experienced the long and tedious pathway that community organizations had to follow in order to cut through bureaucratic opposition to secure the establishment of the *National Parks & Wildlife Service*. It would seem that he has largely opted for the period since the *Service* derived powers from the *National Parks & Wildlife Act* of 1967.

Writing as one who has been heavily involved in the nature conservation movement since the late 1930s (and to some extent, having had the opportunity to know those who laboured even from the beginning of the 1900s), I have to say that if the prime objective of nature conservation is to conserve the diversity of the biomass, the *Service* has failed, during its twenty-two years

lifetime, to catch up with the deficiencies in the nature reserve system as it enters the critical period to guarantee the prospect of meeting the needs of the biota beyond 2000. As only time will tell, I for one, will not be alive to meet the challenge of my prediction.

There are of course, many reasons for the failure and Whitehouse has referred to some of them, but not all. In my opinion, not to the most significant.

It is very true indeed, that nature conservation has been seen to be dependent upon the establishment of reserves held in public ownership, and as Whitehouse clearly shows, not selected specifically for the contained natural systems, but for several reasons of which recreation in the bush, or beside the sea, or whatever, readily took dominance. In this respect, committed individuals and organizations, amongst them the bushwalkers, dominated the concept of nature conservation as preserving the bush because it gave much pleasure in